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THOUGHTS

ON

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION,

AS ENJOINED, OR ALLOWED,

IN THE

Church of England,

WITH

SOME REMARKS ON THE PRIESTLY OFFICE:

BEING A SEQUEL TO A TRACT, ENTITLED

“ QUID ROMÆ FACIAM ?

OR, NO NEED TO JOIN THE ROMISH COMMUNION ON ACCOUNT OF THE
WANT OF DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.”

BY THE REV.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE foregoing tract was penned at a time when many hearts were failing for fear, and looking after those things which were coming upon us ; and it was thought that some doubts might be removed, and confidence in the truth and safety of our position in the Church be reassured, if it were well considered what that condition really is, and what privileges are secured to its members ; of which, if they do not avail themselves, the blame and unhappiness are their own. *Felices sua si bona nōrint!* Such considerations, urged from various quarters, had their due weight : and though one mighty leader, too much relied on, fell from us, and drew after him a few uneasy spirits, magnified by the fears of some, and the evil speeches of others, far beyond the truth, yet the many remained faithful ; and were, through the grace of God, strengthened in faith and love by active labours in parochial cure of souls, that blessed inheritance of our Church. And thus they might have remained, and peace have been preserved, had not a disturbing cause arisen in another quarter ; namely, from the power assumed by the First Minister of that Sovereign whose brightest title is that of Defender of the Faith ; which seemed to reduce the Church to the condition of a mere creature of the State. Hence arise renewed questions respecting the spiritual right and authority actually belonging to the Church ; which, though capable of being strained beyond due limits, must not be abandoned or betrayed, lest life itself be endangered. One of the most prominent at the present crisis, and most important of these, respects the power vested in the priesthood to receive confession, and absolve the penitent. This is, with many among us, a point of vital importance ; of life or death ; of finding here, or seeking elsewhere, the promise of Christ's abiding presence. The following thoughts upon this subject, not originally intended for publication, are, at the suggestion of some friends, put into circulation ; and seem to form a fit addition to the tract to which they are appended.

THOUGHTS ON CONFESSION,

&c.

IN order to ascertain the mind of our Church in this matter, we must look to the Ordinal; for a man can only give that which he has received, and exercise power which has been conferred upon him. The office of a deacon, according to the intention of our Church, is purely ministerial; and if in our day it has attained higher dignity, and any one who holds it is invested with the cure of souls, or acts as curate, according to the proper sense of that word, and of the office which it describes, it is owing to the lamentable deficiency in the number of priests; upon which more may be said in the sequel. It seems manifest that at the age at which a person is capable of being admitted a deacon, very few can be qualified to perform all that is laid upon the higher order in the ministry.

When a deacon is ‘to receive the order of priesthood,’ he has an exhortation addressed to him, which is as just and true in the instruction which it gives, as it is calculated to thrill to the inmost and best feelings of the devout and tender heart, and fill the mind that reflects upon it in after life with awe and fear:—“thoughts that breathe, and words that burn”—that breathe the breath of the Spirit of God infused into them; that burn with the fire of “the live coal, taken from off the altar of the King, the Lord of hosts.” It

speaks in a lofty tone, describing the office as “of so great excellency, and so great difficulty,” of “so high a dignity,” and “so weighty a work,” a ministry “towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ.” And yet higher and of more fearful import is the charge given at the laying on of hands: “Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands: whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.” The Exhortation delivered in the earlier part of the office, and the Charge given at the imposition of hands, pointing out, the one the pastoral, the other the priestly office, may be separately considered, for the better understanding of the sense of the Church upon the subject before us; which indeed conveniently divides itself into two parts, Confession, and Absolution. The division is made, however, only for greater convenience, for the two offices are intimately united.

1. The Exhortation, taking up the thought suggested by each of the passages appointed to be read for the Gospel, points out the duty incumbent upon those who are called to this office, “to teach, and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children that are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.” They are admonished therefore to “have always printed in their remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to their charge. For they are the sheep of Christ, which He bought with his death, and for whom He shed his blood.” And (that we may not exceed due bounds in our extract) they are solemnly warned, “see that you

never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life." This is indeed a mighty work, requiring of any one who undertakes it, that he be not only "strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus," but that he be "instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine; do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of his ministry." How is this work to be accomplished by a parochial minister?

It is manifest, that for providing "that no place be left in his flock for error in religion, or for viciousness of life," he must make himself acquainted, so far as he is able, with the opinions and the practice of every individual who is committed to his charge. Indeed, he is required, and promises, "the Lord being his helper," to "use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick, as to the whole, within his cure, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given." His office, and mode of executing it, may be illustrated by the conduct of those who minister to earthly necessities. For instance: how does a physician proceed in his work of healing a sick body? Does he content himself with a very general or superficial knowledge of the state of his patient? Does he not examine him thoroughly, and watch every symptom and indication of disease? May he not say to his patient, especially if he knows something of his condition, "Now, I think it very likely that you have inherited a sickly constitution—it is the case with all of us, more or less; but I suspect you have done yourself harm by your course of life; and moreover, that you are mistaking the seat of the disorder: you think your head is

the part chiefly affected, but I believe it to be the heart, or the liver, or some other organ: tell me now—it will not go any farther—whisper in my ear, if you will—have you not indulged more than was prudent? even in what is allowable, and, still more, in what is natural to youth? You must enable me to give you good advice if you ask it of me.” And then he will prescribe remedies to be used immediately, and a course of living suitable to the case; abstinence from stimulating food or liquor, early rising, regular hours, and all that bodily discipline which may produce a healthy action. The medical adviser, if he knows his business, will likewise pay attention to his patient’s state of mind, and temper, and peculiar views. We might mention many other points: but enough upon this head. Only, of course a different mode of treatment will be adapted to different subjects: one will be dealt with freely and plainly, or searchingly; and another most tenderly, and with all possible delicacy. Now, I would ask, is it any thing but mere spiritual quackery for one, whose office is to heal a sick soul, perhaps sick unto death, to proceed in a different manner? When relief or cure is to be administered, must not the heart be probed, and the conscience awakened to a knowledge of some fatal error, or some bad habit, or some lurking mischief, or some heavy weight that presses down the soul? and a course of discipline be enjoined, which will, indeed, in some instances, be much the same with that prescribed by the physician—temperance, abstinence, and the like? All this, I presume, is no more than would be allowed, or required, in a priest of our Church, who has undertaken the charge of a cure of souls.

Take another illustration. A man, who has outrun his means, applies to his friend, who is versed in the mystery of book-keeping, for counsel; or to a friend, who has both means and inclination to help him: will not the first word that is spoken to him by either of them be, “Now you must

tell me your whole condition, or I can do nothing for you ; there is no serving a man, while any debt, or incumbrance, or engagement, remains behind undisclosed ?” And how shall the spiritual adviser help any one to make up his account between God and his soul, if any secret sins are allowed to remain under a profession of sincerity ; or help him to obtain peace of mind, and the favour of God, and strength of resolution to abandon an evil course and practise holiness, if there be some bad temper, and a spirit of deceit, spoiling all his endeavours, and wasting the soul of the hypocrite or the self-deceiver ?

To apply all this to making confession to a minister of Christ. Let it be borne in mind how many there are who need to be told of the evil of their ways and their inclinations, and of the deceitfulness of their own heart ; and who are too light-minded, or forgetful, or afraid to make confession to God : how many require, and would even rejoice to find, a wise and tender friend, to whom they may unburden their griefs, and fears, and unworthiness. How often has a clergyman had occasion to lament that he did not know the thoughts of some under his care in time to prevent their being led astray by false teachers, or the evil working of wicked men and seducers. How many souls might be saved by a free and timely opening of the heart to God’s priest !

Confession, at least, opening of grief, is enjoined or recommended by our Church in two instances—preparing for the Holy Communion, and for death ; indeed, in every stage of sickness. In the latter instance, much power is evidently given to the priest in using exhortation. He is directed to “examine the sick person, whether he repent him truly of his sins, and is in charity with all men ; and to move him to make special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter.” In the former case, which is of more general application, those who

are minded to come to the Holy Communion are publicly exhorted to open their state, if they "cannot quiet their conscience by self-discipline and penitence, to God's minister, that they may obtain further comfort or counsel, and the benefit of absolution, by the ministry of God's word." Now what the priest is directed to pronounce publicly, he surely must feel it to be his duty to say privately, to those who will hearken to him. He is bound to use a like admonition to the members of his flock, whom he is striving to bring to a sense of their duty, in respect of a regular and worthy attendance at this Holy Ordinance.

Again, in the preface to the Communion Service a strong wish is expressed that the ancient discipline of the Church might be restored. In that case confession of sin would be made, and public penance enjoined, for the saving of souls. Here too seems to be a rule for the guidance of the pastor, that he should endeavour by private monition to supply the defect which the Church owns and laments. And as he is directed to pronounce publicly the wrath of God against sin in the form set down in the Communion Service, and the very solemn address which follows, and lead the congregation to most humble and earnest supplication, he must do the same in private, as he sees occasion, using of course much delicacy and discretion.

But in tending his flock generally, according to the admonition given at his ordination, how is he to fulfil the duty laid upon him, so that, if possible, "no place may be left either for error in religion, or viciousness of life?" and how is he to "bring them to ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ," if he is to remain in ignorance of their sins and weaknesses and several necessities?

Suppose, now, that in the course of his daily rounds, "seeking for Christ's sheep that are scattered abroad," the pastor meets with one whose conscience is sore burthened,

or in much perplexity, or brought to a view and sense of sin, and the danger of it, beyond what has been seen or felt before, and “requireth comfort or counsel,” how is he to deal with such? Will he not, with all possible skill and tenderness, seek to probe the wound, and ascertain the cause of the malady, and how far it has spread? and minister advice or consolation with firmness and gentleness? and, while he soothes the penitent, prescribe a remedy with what discretion he may use, and with due regard to the circumstances of each individual? And how is this to be done without the most perfect knowledge which he can obtain, that he may not be deceived, nor deceive those with whom he has to do, nor suffer them to deceive themselves? Will not his language be, “You must tell me all your needs, if you seek to have them supplied by any advice or help that I can give? Whatever may be unfit for me to know, I of course do not desire to know. There may be much between God and your own conscience which you would not reveal to any one; much likewise between yourself and others, which it would involve both you and them in difficulty to make known; many family secrets which should be kept from the whole world; or thoughts which may not be breathed to the most intimate friend of one’s bosom. And in all points and every instance you must lay open your whole soul to the Great Searcher of hearts, in order that you may obtain full pardon by free confession. But if you believe a certain power and authority to be given to those who minister in holy things, not usurping the prerogative of the Most High, but as instruments in His hands to convey spiritual help and grace and an assurance of divine favour; if you believe that this gift cannot be bestowed in vain, where any one is faithful in receiving and exercising it; and you are led to seek counsel and comfort from such an one, then give him the means of ministering to your necessities faithfully in regard to God, and profitably to yourself,

by freely opening your heart to him, so far as it may be lawfully done. And this without fear of being betrayed, or of any improper use being made of it." Such will be his language to any one of tender conscience sorely burthened, needing much of direction and consolation, but timid, reluctant; seeking help, but ashamed and afraid to ask for it; coming to God's minister, as to one who may speak in His stead, with a feeble resolution, which has been growing up in the heart under the influence of God's grace, and in the use of devout prayer.

But the shepherd is to seek out the lost sheep, and those which are scattered; the fisher of men is to cast his net upon the waters, and by all lawful means, "by blameless guile and gentle force," to catch souls; to watch occasions which may arise, and use them to the best advantage; to preach over again at the homes of his people the sermons he has delivered at Church; and to find matter for his sermons in discovering the necessities of those whom he is to address. He must seek opportunities of speaking to his people individually. The great art in preaching is to make each one feel his or her own part in what is spoken; but this can be done effectually only by domiciliary visits, and by bringing his parishioners to his own home. Little, comparatively, is to be done by talking to a woman at her wash-tub, or to a man who is at his daily labour; and if a parent is to be rebuked or exhorted, it must not be in the presence of the children. The people must be invited to private conference at the parsonage or the vestry; and there dismissing the thought and fear of forced auricular confession, a free acknowledgment of sin and error be, if possible, elicited from the one party, and faithful admonition be given by the other. What will any one say who is negligent of duty, or following schismatical teachers? that he is as good as his neighbours; or hearing the Gospel, and in a safe way. But it is needless to show the importance, and even

necessity, of the most intimate communication of the pastor's thoughts; of his learning the state of each one's heart and mind, views, and opinions; to get into the heart of each, and gain confidence, and by patience to win souls. We speak of the spiritual pastor and fisher of men; let us remember too the Apostle's words, "Ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." Let any one who admires the union of gentleness with power in the great Apostle, strive to imitate him in affectionate earnestness towards his own flock, blended with the plainness and simplicity of truth.—It is an unseemly thing for one, who is conscious of many sins and negligences, even to bear the appearance of an adviser of his brethren, when he greatly needs their prayers on his own behalf; but in a season of great peril for the Church, when many are offended, it were unfaithfulness to forget the words of our great Teacher, and fail to "magnify our office, if by any means we may save some of them."

The common sense view of things, then, so to speak, is, that if the pastor is to fulfil the office assigned him, and the flock to profit by his godly admonitions, there must be as much freedom and sincerity of communication among them as is consistent with the rules and decencies of society, and the law of God.—And let this suffice on the subject of Confession, the loss of which, be it remembered, has been lamented by those of greatest note, from Ridley to the present day.

Let one word be written upon the office of confessor. This should be, according to the original use of the word, a confessing of Christ; and we are thus reminded of the duty of "the servant, that he be as his Lord." He should therefore seek to know the sheep of his flock, and be known of them; to have what he may of that knowledge of the thoughts of those around him, which was perfectly possessed by the Son of God. He should be firm in reproving

the hypocrite and worldly, and especially in maintaining the honour due to God; but mild and compassionate, gentle, "full of grace as well as of truth;" and, above all things, careful not to "break the bruised reed, or quench even an expiring spark," if it may be kindled into penitence and love.

But there is a far higher view to be taken, and which involves the power and right use of Absolution. Here we must look more particularly to the gift bestowed by the laying on of the hands of the bishop and presbyters in the office of ordination. The gift is none other than "the Holy Ghost," and the power to "forgive and retain sins." The office of the priesthood is a shadow and emblem, but a true part, of that which is exercised by the great High-Priest in the heavens. He who bears it speaks "on Christ's behalf," for reconciling men to God. He is, in his degree, an intercessor for his people, a mediator, to communicate the will of God, and impart His blessing. And the choicest blessing which can be conveyed through him, is pardon of sin and grace to lead a new life. Both of these are actually conveyed by his instrumentality in the sacrament of baptism, and confirmed by the laying on of the hands of the bishop, once for all; and continually bestowed in the public ordinance of daily worship, but especially and more solemnly, and with higher efficacy, in the Lord's Supper. In the daily service and office for the Holy Communion, public confession of sin is made by priest and people in the most humble and devout posture; and then, while they continue on their knees, he rises to pronounce absolution. The posture so strictly prescribed, the title of priest so carefully given, together with the term "pronounce the absolution," clearly mark a power vested in him. The exact form of words, whether declaratory or precatory, is of little consequence: it does not appear what precise form was used of old. But the course

pursued in the public service may be taken for an expression of the Church's mind in this matter, so far as is needed or is applicable.

There are two occasions on which the Church directs private absolution to be sought for: that of an unquiet conscience in a person who is preparing to receive the Holy Communion, and of one who is visited with sickness. The directions given in the latter instance are plain and sufficient; but it is not so in the former. Alas! the sad neglect of priestly functions has brought us into great difficulty.

The intention of the Church seems to be, that every one who intends to partake of the Holy Communion (which all ought to do) should carefully examine his state of heart and life, and truly repent of his sins. This is the work of each individual, to be performed by himself in his secret chamber. But a tender conscience will often be much disturbed with doubt and misgiving, fears for itself, and a want of full assurance of God's mercy. In this case, recourse is to be had to "some discreet and learned minister of God's word;" to be selected by the person seeking aid (for it needs much care in the choice), that "the benefit of absolution by the ministry of God's holy word" may be obtained "for the quieting of the conscience," and "ghostly counsel and advice," for "avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." This is plainly the order: absolution is the first thing required for healing a sick soul; and then follows sound and prudent advice and direction. Unhappily, the first has been almost entirely put out of sight amongst us; much to the injury, probably, of the second. The absolution is to be "by the ministry of God's holy word." Whether it is intended that the application of the inspired word should stand instead of any particular form, or that the absolution should be conformable to it, and grounded upon it, does not seem clear. The expression was introduced in 1552, and was therefore

intended probably to guard more strictly against the Romish practice. Perhaps it might be agreeable to the intention of the Church, if the priest should address the person applying to him thus: "You come to me as your spiritual adviser, for relief of your doubts, and quieting of your conscience; and this I have endeavoured to do, by setting before you, out of the word of God, His gracious promises of pardon and acceptance, and the gift of the Holy Ghost to the faithful for comfort and peace. And now, in the discharge of my office as a minister of Christ, I give you full assurance of pardon and absolution, thereby receiving you, as fitly prepared by penitence and a quiet mind, to approach the Lord's table. God alone, the Judge of all, can forgive sins: I do not usurp His place and high prerogative. But as it is appointed to me to stand up in the congregation, and at the Lord's table, to absolve and bless those (far worthier than myself, it may be, if personal worthiness were to be regarded) who have joined with me in confession of sin, so now, for your greater assurance of comfort and peace, I grant you, in God's name, remission of sins upon your penitent confession; believing, upon the word of His promise, that the sentence thus pronounced upon earth shall be ratified in heaven."

And if the priest deal thus with meek and gentle spirits, who come to him to be healed of their wounds, is he to act differently towards members of his flock upon any other occasion, who seek his help? It may be considered that he is at all times preparing them for a devout attendance at the Lord's table, and using a similar exhortation to that which he delivers in the Church. But, without reference to this holy mystery, and immediate preparation for it, should any feel their consciences burthened with a sense of sin, or perplexed with doubt and fear, or in any respect weary and heavy laden, and therefore such as the merciful Saviour would invite to Him with promise of refreshment and rest,

should they not come to one of those who are appointed to speak for Him, and in His name? Any one who has opened his heart to his spiritual father, in ante-sacramental confession, can scarce fail to continue a frequent communication with him for obtaining counsel and direction; relief in anxious fears, and inward questionings how far his heart is right before God; and confession of frailty and imperfection, and of stumblings, which will alarm a tender conscience more than grievous falls one who walks heedlessly. And any who have been turned out of an evil course, and brought to penitence and godly living, and have learned to look to their pastor for lessons of progress in holiness, will gladly consult him, and ask his aid in prayer, and assurance of pardon and grace. Some will open their minds more freely than others, and to such he will act more freely the part of a confessor; and if he finds any worn and harassed, and earnestly desirous to avail themselves of that power to remit sins which, by virtue of the laying on of hands, they believe him to possess, will he refuse to give them, by the ministry of God's holy word, the absolution which may dismiss them in peace?

Now, when we consider the delicacy and difficulty which must attend the free confession to be made on the one side, and wise and tender dealing on the other, "even as a nurse cherisheth her children," and look round upon the various characters of those who are admitted into the ministry, must not the same freedom of choice, in respect of the person to whom any one may "open his grief," be allowed in other instances, which is publicly granted to those who are preparing their hearts for the Holy Communion? And this more than ever in the present day? For though a much higher estimate is now taken, than was formed half a century ago, of the nature and duties of the priestly office, yet this is more than counterbalanced by the free admission of per-

sons holding lax opinions on the cure of souls, and the discouragement shown in high quarters to those that would exalt and magnify that office and its ministrations. How shall any one who believes in baptismal regeneration, and the presence and power of Christ in the Eucharist, address himself to a spiritual father, who will repel him with "You had much better go to a priest; you are more than half a Romanist already?" If those who sit in high places exercise their patronage without respect to particular opinions, or with a strong leaning towards such as verge upon heresy or schism, what a stone of stumbling is laid in the way of any one who is earnest for the truth, and would seek it at the priest's mouth! How much greater, if the priest himself be found to repudiate the power and privileges proper to his office, and even the office itself to which they belong? if the meaning of the solemn words conveying it be frittered away, till as little as possible of truth and reality be left; and the office of priest be utterly merged and lost in that of the pastor?

There is another part of the priest's office intimately connected with that which we have considered, namely, Benediction. This likewise must be slighted, or thrown aside, if the office itself be not duly honoured. And we have known some who have departed from the prescribed form in dismissing the congregation, so far as to use the first person plural; thus making themselves part of those who meet together. It is "the Lord who gives his people the blessing of peace;" but if He be pleased to bestow it by the ministry of one whom He would send, the gift will not be impaired, nor should the office lose aught of the grace and dignity which He has conferred upon it. This, like the other parts of the priestly office, was lightly regarded by Hoadly, the favoured object of ministerial patronage in that day. He taught publicly that they were "trifles and niceties." Alas!

that similar teaching, or worse, should be found now among us! The good God defend us, that the next age be not, like that which went before us, a *seculum tepidum*! Or rather, that the latitudinarian temper of the day, opening, strange as it may seem, an easy prey to the Romish spoiler, may not bring upon us the fearful age of unbelief! Benediction is directed to be pronounced in every form of Church services, and whenever a sick person is visited; and who is there, whether bishop or priest, who will hesitate to give a blessing in private intercourse to those who desire it? Benediction is not a less priestly office than absolution; and they may mutually illustrate each other.

All that has been written will perhaps be said by some persons to be absolutely Romish, which is clearly untrue; by others to have a Romanizing tendency, which is more plausible. For such, by God's permission, is the art of the evil one, that the use of that which is good easily degenerates into the abuse of it, and actual evil. We may expect to find a great truth, perverted and distorted, at the bottom of every Papal corruption. And here is that which suggests much serious reflection upon the causes which may have brought us to such a state, that the faithful carrying out of the principles and requirements of our Church is denounced as of a Romish or Romanizing character. And the one main cause is, that we of the clergy have neglected to "stir up the gift that is in us by the putting on of hands." The Socinianism of Hoadly, infused an evil principle which spread through the whole Church with little exception; for where it did not touch the true faith, it marred the right use of it. This was aided by the Erastianism of the age; which was indeed part of the evil system, injuring or even destroying the ministrations of the clergy. The parochial system, even when imperfectly carried out, and under all the disadvantage of feeble or partial superintendence, and in

fields of labour far too wide for the power of the spiritual husbandmen, could not fail to produce an immense amount of good, and the turning of many to righteousness, and of keeping them from error. But the clergy, even where they have taken delight in being excellent pastors, have too often forgotten that they are priests; and have been backward to exercise this their office, even though they might acknowledge it in their own hearts, and desire to be able to execute it for the benefit of their flocks. Very few, probably, till of late, have been in the habit of reading the first notice of the Holy Communion at full length; and fewer still have enforced the concluding exhortation in private. The consequence is that now, when Romanism makes its advances upon us, at a time, when (as it should seem) there is a strong disposition in the minds of many to lean upon authority, we are unprepared to meet the enemy, (alas! that we must so think of a brother!) with the true answer that we have in our own Church the power with which our Lord invested His Apostles, and they their successors. For, even if owned by us, it has been suffered to lie dormant; and many who speak of it, and would use it, do not know how; many more cannot distinguish it from the papal usurpation by the Romish priests; and some few by an injudicious exercise of it, incur censure from their superiors, and become an occasion of greater harm and loss. The upholders of a sound Church principle are all the worse spoken of; the Government, strengthened by the opposite party leaning upon it, becomes more oppressive; the right of deliberation is denied to the Church, and even the right and power of deciding upon truth or error in doctrine. What marvel, however poignant the grief, if the allegiance of many of the best and holiest spirits amongst us, is shaken, or transferred to another quarter; where those who are disturbed with fears and doubts seek to find rest; those who require the active ex-

ercise of their powers, to find a wide field of employment; the devout heart to be refreshed with the regular and continual services of prayer and praise: and all to obtain support in leaning upon an authority which claims obedience; as inheriting from the Apostles, and exercising a power to open and shut, to remit and retain sins. That all these will be disappointed of finding what they seek, at least to their entire satisfaction, is easily said, and may be readily believed. The great question, however, is whether they might not, some at least, be retained among us. It has pleased God to make the character and complexion of men's minds as various as of their bodies. If those who are of a free and bold disposition may be indulged in "the freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free," taking the caution that they "use not this liberty for a cloke of maliciousness," surely those who are more timid and flexible may have equal indulgence granted to their fears and poverty of spirit. If some are permitted to "judge even of themselves what is right," others may be allowed and exhorted to "hear the Church," and "obey those that have the rule over them, and submit themselves, as to those that watch for their souls," and "are set over them in the Lord." But the truth is that the people in general, as they are willing to be saved the trouble of judging for themselves, so they are glad to be relieved of the greater trouble of being their own guides and counsellors, and to shift the responsibility upon others. And the few who are placed in authority are naturally led to claim more than properly belongs to them. The dissenting minister is equally despotic with the Roman Catholic priest, where he can get any to own his power.

The remedy is to be found in a *just* exercise of authority. The first point is, that we should have a sufficient number of spiritual fathers, and of those who may minister in holy things, and the care of souls: that our bishops be increased

twofold, and priests and deacons tenfold. The next, that each should know and consider his proper office, and the nature and dignity of it—that it is both pastoral and priestly. The former implies a most awful charge under the Great Shepherd; and one which engages the affections deeply and tenderly. The latter brings him who executes it nearer to God; being in due subordination to the High-Priest in the heavens, a mediator and intercessor, to offer a sacrifice continually, commemorative of that which was once offered for the sins of all men; and to pronounce pardon of penitent sinners, and bless in His name. As a pastor, he will “seek out the sheep that are scattered;” he will “know his sheep, and be known of them;” his great object will be to lead them to God by repentance; by faith, and love; and the public worship being both the test of piety, and the means of growing in grace, this will be always prominent in his thoughts and exhortations. Here he acts as a priest of the Most High God. And one of his most earnest endeavours will be to give his people high notions of the excellence and dignity of worship in God’s house; of a preparation of heart necessary for faithful and profitable attendance upon it; and the benefit of confession of sins, and absolution and benediction, to be found there. One after another will be brought to see the higher duty and privilege of attending at the table of the Lord; and with these he will deal more closely and tenderly in the way of admonition and of comfort. In every instance he will desire the most intimate acquaintance with the members of his flock and congregation; and while he teaches them that the working out of their own salvation is to be done by each one for himself, under the helping grace of God, he will encourage them to look to him as God’s minister, performing his several offices “in Christ’s stead.” And as, while he will not neglect to “warn the unruly,” his chief care and joy, and wherein he will look most hopefully for

profit, will be to “comfort the feeble-minded, and support the weak,” he will¹ invite and encourage all such to come to him, and all “who cannot quiet their conscience” by the exercise of repentance and faith, communing with their own hearts, to seek the assurance of pardon, as well as “further comfort or counsel,” at “the priest’s mouth.” (For less surely cannot be spoken of him, than of the priest under the law, that his “lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.”)—Lastly; in receiving to private and most confidential communing those who will open their heart’s sores for healing and medicine, whether in immediate preparation for the Holy Communion, or on any other occasion, he will repeat from the word of God passages, full of comfort, containing rich promises made to the weary and heavy laden; particularly the several gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of our Lord. And may he not add, “If now you find that these words speak to your heart with comfort, kneel down, and I, as the minister of Him who has spoken them, and with authority derived from Him, say in His name, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace.’”

What has been now said may lead to much consideration of all that belongs to the priestly office, properly so called; and may receive strength and illustration from every part of it. Let a word be spoken upon the evils which arise out of the neglect of it.

First, a low esteem of the Sacraments (for there will be

¹ One chief token of a priest in our Church is, that he invites to private intercourse, not compels; acts by persuasion, not force; not as “having dominion,” or being “lord over God’s heritage,” but “helping their faith.” And the words “ghostly counsel and advice,” to which was added “comfort” in King Edward’s first book, repeating the word, seem to point in the same direction. He is to soothe the penitent, and not to usurp a power over any one’s conscience, but give mild and wholesome counsel for the proper management of it.

none to represent the Great High-Priest at the font or the altar) and other ordinances of the Church. In Confirmation, for instance, the attention will be, and often is, directed exclusively to the part performed, on the one side, by the youthful candidates for the privilege, who take upon themselves the baptismal vow ; keeping out of sight the high grace and benefit therein conferred. The office of preaching is extolled, not only to an undue elevation above the prayers of the Church, but to the depreciation of its services. The daily sacrifice is unfrequented, and therefore perhaps “ taken away ;” in forgetfulness of that which is placed in the word of prophecy in immediate sequence to this, “ the setting up of the abomination which maketh desolate ².” Again, the want of a ministering priesthood not being deeply felt, there is no willing contribution of funds freely offered for its support ; and its place is supplied by others of man’s appointment, perhaps without the cognizance or consent of the Church and its rulers,—Scripture readers, Sunday-school teachers, and others ; useful aids in doing the Lord’s work, but acting without authority, and too often speaking their own words. And hence too comes a low estimate of the work to be done for God and Christ, even where some hearts are moved by a spirit of love. It is foretold that “ in the day of Christ’s power the people shall be willing in the beauty of holiness ;” or “ shall offer free-will offerings with a holy worship.” And as at once a pattern and a type both for the building of the tabernacle and the temple, the people “ offered willingly with a perfect heart ” far more than was needed or required. Now resort is had to fancy sales and bazaars, as if to cheat the eye ; and concerts or popular preaching to please the ear ; and collections are made at the church door, or elsewhere, but rarely presented as an offering to God. Lastly, the Church of England is in danger of losing its proper character and true

² Dan. xi. 31 ; xii. 11.

inheritance—that which it has derived from the Apostles ; which it has maintained through ages of glorious conflict ; which was, through the Divine blessing marvellously extended to it, sealed by the labours and deaths of our illustrious Reformers, whose chief care was to restore, not innovate ; to unite themselves and the Church over which they presided to that of the first ages : to be Catholics, not merely Protestants ; though, be it observed, our Church had been a protesting Church long before the days of Luther and other separatists from Rome. Great cause have we of thankfulness for the guidance of the Spirit of truth, that, in every instance of pressing danger for our Church, the same course has been followed by her best sons. And thus shall we now do honour to the same blessed Spirit, and to our divine Head, who is thus ever present to the faithful ; and to the memory of those whom He sent, and of those who have gone forth in regular succession, with like authority, though with diminished power, “for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Oh ! may we all strive thus to attain to the “unity of the faith, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ !”

And is there not another promise scattered largely through the Scriptures ; and therefore another inheritance, which may be ours, if by faith and patience we lay hold on it ? It is the promise so continually made to the small number, the remnant, the elect, who shall be only as the shaking of the olive-tree, or the gleaning of grapes. These shall lift up the voice to glorify God “in the isles of the sea.” This promise we would make our own, when the powers of the world and of unbelief are united against the Church of God. To maintain the truth, as delivered to it from the beginning, is the privilege of the faithful. The British portion of the Church Catholic is according to its first principles, and those which were recovered at the Reformation, Apostolic in doctrine and

in order. And being primitive, it has been small in its numbers, and must look to be so; it must look to be hated and despised; oppressed by those who fill high places of the earth, and exposed to the scorn and ridicule of such as seek their favour. Absolute power and universal dominion are the claim and boast of Rome; latitudinarian Unbelief and rationalistic Scepticism will please and delude the multitude; and Infidelity, gathering all into itself, will sweep the earth like a wide-wasting pestilence. But there shall be a remnant, a "holy seed"; perhaps as once it was, the "least of all seeds", which shall increase and fill the earth, till "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ." "The Lord will hasten it in his time!"

NOTE.—The attention of the reader is directed (at the suggestion of a most kind friend) to a passage in the Homily of "Common Prayer and Sacraments;" where it is said (arguing that "according to the exact signification of a sacrament there be but two"), "Although absolution hath the promise of forgiveness of sin, yet by the express word of the New Testament, it hath not this promise annexed and tied to the visible sign, which is imposition of hands:" and to one in Bp. Andrewes' Sermon V., "Of the sending of the Holy Ghost:" "A third necessity there is we receive Him, for that with Him we shall receive whatever we want, or need to receive, for our soul's good. And here fall in all His offices. By Him we are regenerated at the first in our Baptism. By Him after, confirmed by the imposition of hands. By Him after, renewed to repentance when we fall away, by a second imposition of hands. By Him taught all our life long," &c. There is also another passage in the Homily of Repentance, Part II., which, after a very earnest refutation of the Roman doctrine of auricular confession, concludes with these words: "I do not say, but that, if any do find themselves troubled in conscience, they may repair to their learned curate or pastor, or to some other godly learned man, and show the trouble and doubt of their conscience to them, that they may receive at their hand the comfortable salve of God's word; but it is against the true Christian liberty, that any man should be bound to the numbering of his sins, as it hath been used heretofore in the time of blindness and ignorance."

THE END.





